

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01

AID-05 /062 W

----- 053633

R 010900Z AUG 75

FM AMCONSUL LAHORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0528

INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMCONSUL KARACHI

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PK

SUBJECT: EX-AMIR OF BAHAWALPUR BECOMES GOVERNOR OF PUNJAB

REF: LAHORE 875

1. AS EXPECTED (REFTEL), GHULAM MUSTAFA KHAR'S RESIGNATION AS GOVERNOR OF PUNJAB WAS ACCEPTED EFFECTIVE JULY 31 AND MOHAMMAD ABBAS ABBASI, FORMER AMIR OF BAHAWALPUR STATE, WAS SWORN IN AS SUCCESSOR SAME AFTERNOON. I ATTENDED SHORT-NOTICE BUT IMPRESSIVE SWEARING-IN CEREMONY AT GOVERNOR'S HOUSE IN WHICH CHIEF MINISTER QURESHI AND OTHER SENIOR ADMIN AND JUDICIAL OFFICIALS PARTICIPATED. KHAR CONSPICUOUS BY ABSENCE.

2. ABBASI, POINTEDLY REFERRED TO AS "MR." THROUGHOUT PROCEEDINGS, ABDICATED AS AMIR ON AGREEING TO MERGER OF PRINCELY STATE INTO WEST PAKISTAN IN 1955. HE IS QUIET, DISTINGUISHED PERSON WHO APPEARS IDEALLY SUITED FOR PLAYING LARGELY CEREMONIAL ROLE OF GOVERNOR UNDER PRESENT CONSTITUTIONAL SYSTEM. APPOINTMENT IS WIDELY VIEWED AS REPUTATION OF POLITICAL MEDDLING BY HIS PREDECESSOR AND CONFIRMATION OF SUPREMACY OF CHIEF MINISTER IN GOVERNING PROVINCE. INTERESTINGLY, NEW GOVERNOR AND CHIEF MINISTER MADE DISPLAY

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OF AFFECTIONATE EMBRACE AT DAIS IMMEDIATELY AFTER CEREMONY.

3. ADDITIONAL SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ABBASI'S SELECTION, AS SUGGESTED IN REFTEL, IS GENERAL ASSUMPTION THAT IT WAS DESIGNED TO MOLLIFY PROVINCIAL SEPARATIST SENTIMENT AMONG PEOPLE OF BAHAWALPUR, NOW A DIVISION OF PUNJAB. KNOWLEDGEABLE OBSERVERS RECALL THAT ABBASI ENCOURAGED ADVOCATES OF "BAHAWALPUR SUBAH (PROVINCE)" IN 1970 GENERAL ELECTIONS, MOST OF WHOM DEFEATED PPP OPPONENTS. OBSERVERS, INCLUDING BAHAWALPUR OPPOSITIONISTS WITH WHOM I TALKED AFTER CEREMONY, AGREE THAT ABBASI'S EXAMPLE IN ACCEPTING GOVERNORSHIP WILL BE INTERPRETED AS CLEAN CHANGE OF HEART AND FULL SUPPORT FOR STATUS QUO WHICH, THEY SAY, LIKELY TO BE PERSUASIVE WITH PUBLIC.

4. INDICATIVE OF THIS IS POINTED SENTENCE IN PRIME MINISTER BHUTTO'S LETTER OF APPOINTMENT TO ABBASI, PROMINENTLY DISPLAYED IN PRESS AUGUST 1 AND NOTED BY POLITICAL PUNDITS: "I AM SURE THAT YOUR APPOINTMENT WILL BE A TOKEN OF MY GOVERNMENT'S REGARD FOR BAHAWALPUR'S EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE AFFAIRS OF THE PROVINCE OF THE PUNJAB." PRIMIN WENT ON TO OBSERVE THAT "RECTIFYING...NEGLECT IN DEVELOPMENT FELT BY THE PEOPLE OF BAHAWALPUR" WAS ONE OF OBJECTIVES OF GOP, AND THAT APPOINTMENT WAS "TANGIBLE SIGN OF RECOGNITION OF SIGNAL SERVICE" RENDERED BY ABBASI'S FATHER IN DECIDING TO ACCEED STATE TO PAKISTAN IN 1947 AGAINST HEAVY PRESSURE.

5. WE HAVE NO CLEAR INDICATION YET AS TO KHAR'S PLANS BUT HEAR INCREASINGLY THAT HE WILL BE AWARDED SEAT IN PUNJAB ASSEMBLY FROM WHICH TO KEEP HIS HAND IN PROVINCIAL HULITICS. PRIMIN, PRESIDENT CHOUDHRY AND OTHER GOP LEADERS VISITING LAHORE AUGUST 1 AND PUNJAB CABINET NOW LIKELY TO BE FIRMED UP.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PERSONNEL RESIGNATIONS, PERSONNEL ASSIGNMENTS, PROVINCIAL GOVERNOR
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 01 AUG 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: MartinML
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975LAHORE00887
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750267-0655
From: LAHORE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750891/aaaadcgz.tel
Line Count: 94
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 LAHORE 875
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: MartinML
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 18 AUG 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <18 AUG 2003 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <03 DEC 2003 by MartinML>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: EX-AMIR OF BAHAWALPUR BECOMES GOVERNOR OF PUNJAB
TAGS: PINT, PK, (KHAR, GHULAM MUSTAFA), (ABBASI, MOHAMMAD ABBAS)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006